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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000072

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [PHSA](#) [EWWT](#) [MOPS](#) [RS](#) [TK](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: TRYING TO WORK WITH TURKEY ON SHIP ISSUES

REF: A. EMBASSY TBILISI - EMBASSY ANKARA EMAILS
[1](#)B. TBILISI 1665

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Kent Logsdon for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment. Georgia is willing to negotiate with Turkey to find a way forward on Turkish commercial vessel travel to Sukhumi, but is looking for cooperation from the Government of Turkey to resolve technical issues. The only Georgian redline is that all vessels stop at a port in undisputed Georgian territory before traveling on to Abkhazia. The question of ship transit to Abkhazia is only one of many issues brewing in the Black Sea. Another issue that will undoubtedly spark controversy, especially when/if drilling occurs or discoveries are made, is the recent agreement between the Russian and Abkhaz authorities and their respective commercial interests to research and explore for oil and gas off the Abkhaz coast. The Georgians appear sincere in their desire to work with the Turks on vessel travel to Sukhumi, but are frustrated with what they see as the Turks' lack of engagement on practical issues that still must be resolved. The GoG acknowledges our strong advice to find a practical solution, with all Georgian government agencies aware of U.S. concerns to avoid provocations. However, in return for their restraint, the Georgians seek corresponding pressure on Russia to discontinue their provocative economic activities in Abkhazia. End summary and comment.

MAKE IT WORK

[1](#)2. (C) In a December 13 meeting, we emphasized to the MFA's Director for European Affairs Shota Gvineria and Director of Americas Division Otar Berdzenishvili the need for Georgia to find a practical resolution with Turkey to commercial vessel travel to Sukhumi. After consulting with colleagues in Embassy Ankara (ref A), we relayed that the Government of Turkey supports Georgia's territorial integrity and is willing to agree to the stipulation that ships call first at Poti or Batumi, but is looking for flexibility in the type of shipments allowed - specifically, assurance that cargoes other than humanitarian will be allowed. Poloffs also conveyed the message that clearing the board of past transgressions with some form of amnesty could be very helpful to negotiations and urged the GOG to consider carefully the negative ramifications of auctioning seized Turkish ships back to their owners.

A BIT OF THE BLAME GAME

[1](#)3. (C) Gvineria said that the Government of Georgia has already made the political decision to reach a resolution with Turkey on this issue and is determined to find a mutually acceptable way forward. He said that Georgia's only redline is that all vessels stop in Poti or Batumi before

proceeding to Sukhumi, and that all other issues are negotiable as long as Georgian law is not violated. He said that currently the government is working to establish the technical mechanisms without violating Georgian legislation. According to Gvineria, the Georgians have attempted to bring Turkish experts to the table for over three months to work on these technical issues without success. He charged the Turks with trying to raise the level of negotiations by keeping the discussions at a political level (thereby delaying progress on technical issues), citing the anticipated February visit of Turkish MFA Deputy Undersecretary Unal Cevikoz as an example. Gvineria stressed that the only obstacle to a solution is the lack of engagement from the Turks on the technical mechanisms.

BLACK SEA OIL EXPLORATIONS

14. (C) Russia continues to pursue a myriad of economic activities in Abkhazia. An agreement signed on December 24, 2009 between Russian company Rosneft, Abkhaz company Abkhaztop, Abkhazian de facto ministry of economy and the company RN-Abkhazia gave Rosneft the right to begin research and exploration activities to look for oil and gas on the Black Sea continental shelf at Gudauta. The Georgian MFA strongly protested this agreement, citing violation of international laws, as well as the Law on Occupied Territories, which imposes restrictions on entrepreneurial activity in the disputed territories. The agreement is also in violation of Georgia's Law on Oil and Gas, which states that oil and gas resources in the territory of Georgia are considered state property and only the state has exclusive

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right to exploit these resources.

COMMENT: PRESSURE ON GEORGIA NOT ENOUGH

15. (C) Georgia has shown itself responsive to international concerns over ship seizures in the Black Sea by ceasing those seizures and entering discussions with Turkey. While it acknowledges the problematic legal basis of and dangerous potential for escalation from seizures, Georgia also insists that its right to govern economic activity throughout its territory -- including Abkhazia -- be respected. In order to muster enough political will to achieve a workable system that satisfies Turkey and enables shipping to Abkhazia -- such as one that includes an amnesty for previous incidents -- Georgia will likely need reassurance that the international community also recognizes its concerns about encroachments on its economic sovereignty.

LOGSDON